



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

CULTURAL ANTIQUITY RETURNED TO IRAQI GOVERNMENT AFTER ICE INVESTIGATION

-- Mesopotamian Cylindrical Seals Dating To 2000 B.C. Were Stolen from Baghdad Museum--

K, N.Y. -- Michael J. Garcia, the Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and His Excellency Samir Sumaidaie, the Ambassador of Iraq to the United Nations, today announced the return of stolen 20th century B.C. cultural antiquities to the government of Iraq.

In a ceremony at 26 Federal Plaza, Assistant Secretary Garcia returned three Mesopotamian Cylindrical Seals from the Akkadian period, estimated to date back to between 2340 and 2180 B.C. to Ambassador Sumaidaie.

The seals are about an inch tall and ½ inch in diameter and have partially preserved registration numbers written on them that are used by the Iraq Museum (Baghdad) cataloging system. Expert analysis concluded that the seals are genuine and a comparison to Iraq Museum Catalog cards last May confirmed that the seals once belonged to the Iraq Museum collection.

“By returning these national treasures, we restore their integrity,” said Assistant Secretary Garcia. “Now, these items are no longer classified as illegal contraband, sitting in a seized evidence locker. Instead these priceless artifacts will soon resume their millennium-old role in helping to highlight the proud and long heritage of the Iraqi people.”

“We are grateful for the vigilance of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents who successfully retrieved and are now returning a part of Iraq’s heritage back to where it belongs,” said Ambassador Sumaidaie.

On June 11, 2003, Mr. Joseph Braude arrived at Kennedy Airport in New York from London. During a routine customs examination, Customs and Border Protection officers found three cylindrical stone seals inside his suitcase which had been not been declared on Braude's customs declaration.

These marble and alabaster seals variously portrayed human and animal figures and were all marked on the bottom in black ink with the initials "IM" and a serial number. When questioned, Braude claimed he had traveled only to Kuwait and England, but not to Iraq, during his trip. The objects were seized and Mr. Braude was permitted to leave.

ICE brought the seals to an associate professor of ancient Near Eastern art and archeology at Columbia University, who inspected the seals and authenticated them as Mesopotamian Cylindrical Seals of the

Akkadian period, c.2340-2180 B.C., which appear to have been removed from the collection of the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad.

When questioned at his Cambridge, Massachusetts, home on June 18, 2003, Braude admitted to ICE special agents that he had in fact traveled to Baghdad on his trip earlier that month, and that he had purchased the seals there for \$200.

BRAUDE, the author of "The New Iraq: Rebuilding the Country for its People, the Middle East, and the World," and a self-described student of Near Eastern languages and Islamic history at Yale and Princeton, who also represents himself to be a consultant to governments and corporations on Middle Eastern affairs, acknowledged that when he bought the seals, he knew that they had probably been stolen from the Iraqi National Museum.

ICE Special Agents obtained a federal arrest warrant and arrested Braude on August 8, 2003 for smuggling violations under Title 18, USC Section 545: "Importation contrary to law."

On August 3, 2004, Braude pled guilty to all three counts of his indictment (smuggling and false statements) and was sentenced to 6 months of house arrest and 2 years of probation.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.